THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

connections

Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

Commission celebrates International Human Rights Day

The Human Rights community in Winnipeg gathered on a snowy December 8, 2016 to celebrate International Human Rights Day at its annual Human Rights Awards event hosted in partnership with the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties. The Commission has had an awards program for the last twenty eight years.

For the first time ever, the Human Rights Commitment Award was given to a provincial government program, Tracia's Trust, a strategy aimed at trafficking and sexual exploitation. The program is named in honour of 14 year old Tracia Owen who committed suicide in 2005 while in the care of CFS and was a child involved in prostitution. The strategy works to coordinate services and prevent sexual exploitation.

Previous recipients of the award are listed on the Commission's website and include Meet Me at the Bell Tower, PRIDE Winnipeg, The Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, The Rainbow Resource Centre and LGBT advocates, Chris Vogel and Richard North. Nominations for the 2017 awards are expected to open on September 1, 2017.

Members of Tracia's Trust at the 2016 Human Rights Awards Ceremony

The Rights Connection

By Isha Khan, Executive Director & Counsel

In December 2017, the Commission will be giving out the inaugural Aaron Berg award to a legal professional who has advanced human rights in the province.

Aaron Berg, a long time human rights advocate, was actively involved in the redevelopment of the previous *Human Rights Act* in the the mid 1980's and later served as legal counsel to the Commission, acting as counsel on several notable human rights cases, including the landmark sexual harassment case, *Janzen v. Platy Enterprises*.

The awards committee will make public the criteria for the new award over the next few months. It is hoped that the award will create a greater opportunity to recognize the work of lawyers, law students and other legal professionals who work tirelessly to advocate against discrimination and for social justice.

The Sybil Shack Youth Award was given this year to Lauren Milne, currently studying at the University of North Dakota, Faculty of Law for her volunteer work and academic research on various human rights issues.

Attendance at the annual awards event has been growing each year and 2016 saw a record number of nominations submitted.

Commission beats deadline to create Accessibility Plan

With the public consultation on the new Employment Standard coming up on January 18, 2017, businesses will be turning their attention again to the obligations of employers to ensure accessibility for all Manitobans.

In December, the Board of Commissioners approved an Accessibility Plan that provides an outline of how the Commission will address the Customer Service Standard, which is the first of five standards established under the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act* and applies to all public, private and non-profit organizations.

The plan identifies existing and potential barriers- attidunial, information and communication, technological, systemic, and physical and architectural, in how the Commission provides services to the public.

The Commission released the plan almost a year in advance of the deadline and hopes it will assist others to recognize that creating an inclusive work environment benefits everyone.

Complaint results in policy change

Jodee Mason's complaint alleging discrimination on the basis of sex and family status was recently resolved without the need for an adjudication of the complaint.

The City of Steinbach has updated its food and drink policy in pool facilities to enable parents and caregivers of infants to bottle feed (with plastic bottles) their infants in the pool viewing area. The public is otherwise restricted from bringing food and drink into this area for safety and cleanliness reasons.

The Niverville mom commented, "I am really happy that we were able to come to a resolution that removes some of the barriers that mothers have in the early stages of being a parent. I have learned through this experience that the human rights process can lead to real systemic change".

Steinbach officials commented, "We are pleased to have resolved this matter on a common sense basis, in a manner which addresses concerns about safety and cleanliness but still enables parents of infants to remain in the pool deck area while tending to the needs of their children".

The Commission offers parties the opportunity to try and resolve complaints on a voluntary basis up to three times in the complaint process. At any time, parties can also request mediation and the Commission will do its best to facilitate the request.

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